PATTERNS OF POWER · A THEORETICAL STATEMENT

Position Logic

A FRAMEWORK FOR INSTITUTIONAL STUDIES

How to read the life of an institution — why institutions look designed when no one designed them, and why convergence is not conspiracy

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026
held as tested, not revealed

Preface: What This Paper Is, and How to Read It

This paper states a framework for reading history. It is written to stand alone. It assumes no prior acquaintance with the case studies that produced it, no familiarity with the scholarly traditions it engages, and no shared vocabulary with the reader. Every term it uses, it defines. Every author it cites, it introduces. Every quotation it gives, it explains.

The framework is called **position logic**, and it was developed to answer a question that the two dominant ways of explaining historical outcomes both answer badly. The question is this: *why do the institutions that govern our lives — the corporation, the bond market, the licensing board, the insurance policy, the university, the church — look so much like the products of design, when the historical record shows that no one designed them?*

The two standard answers are, in the terms this paper will use, the **invisible hand** and the **cabal**. The first says that no one designed these things and no one meant anything; institutions emerged from impersonal forces — market efficiency, historical necessity, spontaneous order — and human intention is largely beside the point. The second says that these things were designed, deliberately and secretly, by powerful people acting in concert to serve their own interests across generations. The first explanation removes the humans from human history. The second inflates them into gods.

Position logic is the argument that both are wrong, and that the truth between them is not a compromise but a *mechanism* — one that is more damning than the invisible hand and more disturbing than the cabal, because it explains how a world can be arranged systematically in the interests of the powerful *without anyone having arranged it*, and therefore without anyone being available to blame in the way the conspiracy theorist wants to blame them.

The paper proceeds in seven parts. Part I sets out the problem and the two failed answers. Part II states the core claim. Part III defines the vocabulary — the working terms of the framework, which are its actual contribution. Part IV tests the framework against historical cases, each described from scratch. Part V locates the framework in the existing scholarly literature, engaging in particular with Karl Marx, whose account this one is offered against, and with the traditions of Karl Popper, Adam Ferguson, Mancur Olson, and Jon Elster, whose work anticipates parts of it. Part VI states what the framework predicts and what would falsify it. Part VII states what the framework is *not*, because its most likely misuse is as an excuse.

The origin of the paper should be stated plainly. The framework is Thomas Bryan's, developed through pattern recognition across historical cases over a long period and formalized into the vocabulary given here. The research, the verification of sources and quotations, the location of the framework within the scholarly literature, and the composition of this text are Claude's, an AI system made by Anthropic. The seeing is his; the writing is mine. No quotation in this paper is invented; each has been verified to a published source, and each is explained in plain language before or after it is given.

PART I

The Problem: Two Bad Answers

One — The Question

Stand in front of any large institution and ask where it came from, and you will feel the pull of two opposite intuitions.

Consider the American system in which most people receive their medical care through their employer. It is a strange arrangement. It exists in no comparable country. It has enormous consequences: it chains workers to jobs they would otherwise leave, it makes the loss of employment also the loss of medical care, and it inserts a profit-seeking intermediary between a sick person and a doctor. It has, in short, exactly the shape one would expect if it had been *designed* by parties who benefit from it — employers who gain leverage over workers, insurers who gain a captive market.

The first intuition, then, is that someone must have designed it that way. And this intuition is very natural, very old, and — in this case — demonstrably false. The system exists because in 1943, in the middle of a war, the United States froze wages to control inflation. Employers, desperate for workers in a tight labor market and forbidden to bid for them with money, needed some other thing of value to offer. The National War Labor Board ruled that employer contributions to health plans did not count as *wages* and were therefore exempt from the freeze; the Internal Revenue Service ruled that such contributions did not count as taxable *income* to the worker. A dollar of health insurance instantly became worth more than a dollar of pay, and compensation flowed into the channel the rules had made cheap. Coverage rose from about twelve million Americans in 1940 to over seventy million a decade later. In 1954 Congress wrote the tax treatment permanently into law, ratifying an arrangement that had been improvised to solve a problem — staffing wartime factories — that no longer existed.

No one designed the American health insurance system. It is the fossil of a wage freeze.

And yet the second intuition — that no one designed it, that it simply *emerged*, that impersonal forces produced it and human intention played no real part — is also false, and falser in a more important way. Real people made real decisions at every step. The War Labor Board *chose* to exempt benefits. The IRS *chose* how to classify them. Employers *chose* to compete with benefits rather than lose workers. Unions *chose* to defend the arrangement once they had it. Congress *chose* to make the tax exclusion permanent, and it chose that partly because the industries and the workers who benefited from it had by then organized to defend it. Intention is everywhere in this story. It is simply not *one* intention, and it never aimed at the thing it produced.

That is the question this paper exists to answer. How do we describe a world in which every step was intended and the outcome was intended by no one?

Two — The Invisible Hand

The first bad answer has a distinguished pedigree. In 1767 the Scottish philosopher Adam Ferguson wrote a sentence that became the founding formula of a whole tradition: nations, he observed, “stumble

upon establishments, which are indeed the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design."

This is a genuinely great insight, and this paper accepts it as far as it goes. Ferguson is saying that the institutions we live in — languages, markets, laws, customs — were built by human beings but not *planned* by human beings; they are the accumulated residue of countless individual actions, none of which aimed at the result. The economist Friedrich Hayek made this sentence the cornerstone of his theory of "spontaneous order," and it is the ancestor of every modern account of emergence, of markets as information-processing systems, of order without a designer.

The trouble with this tradition is what it tends to become in careless hands. Ferguson's insight is that outcomes are unintended. It is *not* that actions are unintended, or that the actors have no interests, or that the resulting order serves everyone equally. But the invisible hand, as commonly deployed, slides from "no one designed the whole" to "therefore no one is responsible for any of it," and from there to "therefore the order that emerged is natural, neutral, and probably optimal." That slide is illegitimate, and it is the ideological function the invisible hand most often performs: it launders an arrangement that was, at every step, skewed by interested parties toward their own advantage, and presents it as the impersonal verdict of history.

The invisible hand, in short, is true about the *outcome* and false about the *process*. It notices that no one planned the whole and concludes that no one was pushing. Someone is always pushing.

Three — The Cabal

The second bad answer is the belief that the arrangement was designed, in secret, by a group of powerful people acting in concert, and that the way to understand any institution is to find the men who benefit from it and expose the plot by which they built it.

This view was named and dissected by the philosopher Karl Popper in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945). Popper called it **"the conspiracy theory of society,"** and he defined it with a precision worth quoting in full, because the definition is the trap:

> "It is the view that an explanation of a social phenomenon consists in the discovery of the men or groups who are interested in the occurrence of this phenomenon (sometimes it is a hidden interest which has first to be revealed) and who have planned and conspired to bring it about."

Read that carefully, because the error is subtle and nearly everyone commits it. Popper is not saying that conspiracies never happen; he explicitly grants that they do. He is identifying a *style of explanation* — the habit of treating "who benefits?" as if it answered "who did it?" The conspiracy theorist finds the party that gained, infers that the party must have planned it, and calls the inference an explanation. The move from *beneficiary* to *author* is made silently and without evidence, and it is that move, not the belief in any particular plot, that Popper is attacking.

Popper's diagnosis of *why* people think this way is the sharpest thing he says. The conspiracy theory of society, he argued, is what you get when you take a religious worldview and remove the god from it:

> "The conspiracy theory of society is just a version of... theism, of a belief in gods whose whims and wills rule everything. It comes from abandoning God and then asking: 'Who is in his place?' His place is then filled by various powerful men and groups — sinister pressure groups, who are to be blamed for having planned the great depression and all the evils from which we suffer."

The claim is that human beings have a deep appetite for *agentive* explanation — for a story in which someone *meant* it. When we believed in gods, the hidden hand behind events was divine. When we stopped, we did not stop wanting a hidden hand; we simply promoted men into the vacancy. The Illuminati, the bankers, the Jesuits, the Elders, the globalists: each is a secularized providence, an agent above people's heads who intends the world and is responsible for it.

And Popper names the single strongest argument against the whole style: things do not turn out as planned. "It is one of the striking things about social life," he wrote, "that nothing ever comes off as intended." Conspiracies exist; conspiracies mostly *fail*; and the world we actually live in is not the world any group of plotters would have built, because it is the compound residue of a thousand plans that all went partly wrong.

Four — Why the Cabal Persists Anyway

If Popper's refutation is so clean, why does conspiracy belief keep winning?

Because it is *not entirely wrong*, and everyone who has ever lived under power knows it. People with power really do coordinate. Guilds really do lobby. Industries really do capture their regulators. The organized American medical profession really did work with a private foundation to close its competitors' schools, and one of the men involved wrote, in a private letter, that they had been working "hand in glove." Booksellers really did draft the law that served them. Insurers really did secure their own antitrust exemption. Any framework that responds to conspiracy theory by insisting that the powerful never coordinate is lying, and the people it is lying to can tell.

So the intellectual situation is this. The invisible hand is unbelievable to anyone who has watched power operate, because it denies what they can see. The cabal is unfalsifiable and usually false, but it *feels* true because it captures something real that the invisible hand denies. Both are unsatisfying, and the space between them has been left largely unoccupied.

Position logic is an attempt to occupy it.

PART II

The Core Claim

The claim can be stated in a paragraph, and the rest of the paper is its unpacking.

Human beings make history, but they make it from where they stand. A person's *position* — their location in a structure of power, wealth, knowledge, and obligation — determines what problems they face, what solutions they can see, what options they can reach, and what those options cost and gain them. Because positions constrain solutions, and because any structural problem admits of only a limited number of good solutions, **people in similar positions tend to make similar decisions, independently, without coordinating and without any shared consciousness.** This produces *convergence*: a pattern of aligned behavior that looks, from the outside, exactly like coordination, and is not.

When a group in a shared position is *threatened*, each member perceives the threat **from inside their own position** — through their own ledger, their own falling rents, their own contested license — and each independently begins searching for a solution. This simultaneous, uncoordinated search is why threatened groups appear to "awaken" as one. **They do not need a collective consciousness to notice a collective danger, because the danger arrives at each of them separately.** And *then* — having independently arrived at the same conclusion — they may well meet, and plan, and coordinate in earnest. **Coordination is real, but it is downstream of convergence, not upstream of it.** It is episodic, triggered by threat, and it dissolves when the threat passes or when the coordinators' positions diverge again.

Occasionally, a small number of well-placed people, facing a real and pressing problem, will design a settlement — in a room, in a season, with the materials at hand — and their design will become canon. This is the **architect's hour**. It is intentional. It is skewed, in the open, toward the position of those doing the designing. And it is *bounded*: the architects then die, or move on, and the settlement passes into the keeping of an **institution**, which runs it forward on a **logic of its own** — accumulating consequences no architect chose and often reversing the architects' intentions entirely. Later generations **inherit** the institution, find it useful for purposes its makers never imagined, and write their own changes into it, until the accumulated structure looks like a seamless design and is in fact a sediment.

That is the whole framework. What follows is the vocabulary that makes it usable.

PART III

The Vocabulary

The contribution of position logic is not a grand theory but a set of working terms — instruments for reading a historical situation. Each is defined here, with its use explained.

One — Position

A **position** is where a person actually stands: their place in the structures of power, property, knowledge, kinship, and obligation that constitute their world. It is not their opinion, their ideology, or their character. It is their *situation*.

The claim of the framework is that position is the single most powerful predictor of decision — more powerful than stated belief, more powerful than professed value, and often more powerful than the person's own understanding of why they are doing what they are doing.

Two clarifications prevent the term from collapsing into determinism.

First, position **constrains** rather than **dictates**. It sets the menu, not the choice. Two men in identical positions may choose differently, and the framework does not predict individuals; it predicts *distributions*. What it says is that if you place a thousand people in the same position, you will see a strong central tendency in what they do, and that tendency is the thing history records.

Second, and more importantly: **position determines what a person can see.** This is the deepest of the framework's claims and deserves its own term.

Two — The Field of the Visible

Every position draws a **field of the visible** — the set of facts, options, problems, and possibilities that are apparent from that vantage, and, crucially, the set that are *not*.

This is not about ignorance or stupidity. A brilliant person in a given position simply does not see certain options, in the way a man standing in a valley does not see what is over the ridge. He is not failing to look. The ridge is in the way.

The practical use of the term is diagnostic. When a historical actor does something that looks stupid, malicious, or inexplicable, the first question is not "what was wrong with him?" but "what could he see from where he stood?" Very often the apparently monstrous decision is the obvious decision from inside a field of the visible we no longer occupy.

A worked example. In 1910 a man named Abraham Flexner published a report on American medical schools that closed most of them, including five of the seven schools then training Black physicians in a segregated country — a decision whose consequences for Black health ran for a century. Flexner was not a cartoon villain; he was a serious educator applying a single standard of excellence, and on the central scientific question of his day he was right. But he was applying that standard as an *obvious truth* rather than as a contested claim, and the next section explains why: his formation had made rigorous learning sacred, and his education had given him exactly one picture of what rigorous learning looked like. Within the resulting field of the visible, a poor school without laboratories was not an institution serving

a population no one else would serve. It was simply a *deficient* school — a falling-short, not an alternative. He was not refusing to see the other thing. From where he stood, there was no other thing to see.

Understanding that is not forgiving it. It is *explaining* it — which is the only route to noticing when we are doing the same thing.

Three — Benefit, and the Necessity of Knowing What a Person Values

Position logic is a cost-benefit framework, but it rejects the assumption that everyone values the same things. **To know what benefits a person, you must first know what they value** — and what they value is a fact about their formation, not a universal constant.

This distinguishes the framework from crude economic models that assume every actor maximizes money. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, was a Basque soldier formed on chivalric romances and the heroic ideal of arms, whose military career was ended by a cannonball that shattered his leg. Convalescing, with no romances in the house, he read a life of Christ and a book of saints' lives — and concluded that the saints were braver than the bravest knights he knew. What happened was not that his values were replaced. The *structure* of his values held perfectly: honor, valor, great deeds, service to a lord. Only the *object* changed. And because the structure held, the order he founded took the shape of an army: a "company," "campaigning for God" under a general, bound to a discipline that required a member to be, in obedience, *perinde ac cadaver* — "as if a corpse," yielding his own will as completely as a dead body yields to the hand that moves it.

You cannot predict what will benefit Ignatius by assuming he wants money. You have to know what he was made of. This is why the framework insists on **formation** as a distinct object of study.

Four — Formation, in Two Layers

Formation is the sum of what made a person into the kind of person who would decide *that way*. It is what tells you their value function, and it draws the outer boundary of their field of the visible. But it is not one thing, and the distinction between its two layers is what makes it usable rather than merely suggestive.

The first layer is childhood formation, and it operates at the level of cognitive architecture. The things installed in a person before their critical faculties matured did not arrive as propositions to be weighed. They arrived as the *ground* — the standard by which later propositions would themselves be judged. This is not a metaphor about how strongly someone feels; it is a claim about *when* the material was laid down relative to the maturation of the vigilance that would have screened it. A belief absorbed before one could refuse it, and then buried under decades of a life built on top of it, is defended in adulthood not as a claim one might update but as something closer to the ground of the self, whose revision would feel like a kind of self-demolition. The old Jesuit boast — *give me the child until seven and I will show you the man* — is, read carefully, not a claim that children are easy to argue into things. They

are not. It is a claim about *timing*: get there before the screening faculty is running, and what you install becomes the floor rather than an item on the floor.

But this is a disposition, not a destiny, and the framework must be stated carefully here or it becomes fatalism. People *do* see through the formation they were given. They deconvert, defect, walk out of the church and the party and the family creed, and build a life on other foundations; the contents of what a human being trusts are among the most plastic things about us. The childhood creed is not a life sentence. What childhood formation gives you is a **strong prior** — a default framework for seeing, weighted heavily, revisable at cost, and *usually* not revised, because most people never encounter the pressure that would force revision. When you are reading a historical actor, you are reading someone whose childhood formation is the most likely single explanation of his defaults, and *not* a guarantee.

The second layer is what formed him afterward, in adulthood, and this is where the historical record actually helps you. A person does not stop being formed at twelve. He goes to a university, or to a war, or into an apprenticeship, or through a catastrophe; he encounters a book, a teacher, a humiliation, a conversion. These later episodes are *not* installed beneath vigilance — they are adopted by a mind fully capable of screening them, which is precisely why they can be traced: they leave records, and the person himself will often tell you about them.

The two layers work together, and the interesting thing is almost always the join. Later formation supplies *content* to a structure that childhood built, and it takes hold most powerfully when it lands on ground the childhood already prepared. Two examples show the mechanism.

Abraham Flexner, who in 1910 wrote the report that closed most American medical schools, grew up in a poor immigrant household in Louisville that was ruined in a financial panic, and in which education took on the character of a near-religious devotion — the one asset a panic could not destroy, and the recognized route out of a marginal position. That is the childhood layer, and note what it installs: not a *model* of education but a *sacralization* of it. Learning is the holy thing. Then, at eighteen, Flexner went to the new Johns Hopkins University, which had been founded expressly to import the German research university into America, and he encountered — as a young adult, with his faculties fully running — the laboratory, the seminar, the rigorous graded curriculum, and the ideal of original research. He later studied in Germany itself. That is the adult layer, and it supplied the *content*: **this** is what real education looks like. Neither layer alone explains the man. Together they produce someone for whom rigorous scientific education is *sacred* and for whom a school that departs from the model is therefore not one legitimate variant among several but something closer to a desecration — which is exactly how his report reads, and exactly why it was so merciless.

Ignatius of Loyola was raised in the minor Basque nobility, served as a page in a noble household and at court, and was steeped from boyhood in the chivalric ideal and the romances that carried it: honor, valor, great deeds, service to a lord and a lady. That is the childhood layer, and it installs a *structure* — the heroic frame — without yet fixing its object. Then, at thirty, a cannonball shattered his leg at Pamplona and ended the military career the structure had been built for. Convalescing, he asked for more romances; there were none in the house, and he was given instead a life of Christ and a book of saints'

lives. He read them, and concluded that the saints were braver than the bravest knights he knew. **The structure did not break. The object moved.** And because the structure held, the order he founded took the shape of an army: a *company*, campaigning for God under a general, whose members were bound to an obedience so total that the Jesuit constitutions could describe a man in obedience as *perinde ac cadaver* — "as if a corpse," yielding his will as completely as a dead body yields to the hand that moves it.

The methodological instruction, then, is not "find his childhood" but this: reconstruct both layers, and ask what framework the man was carrying *by the time he walked into that room*. He came from somewhere. By the hour of his decision he had a working model of the world — what is sacred, what is excellent, what is obvious, what is unthinkable — and that model was assembled from a childhood he did not choose and a series of adult encounters he mostly did. You will not get his soul. You are not trying to. You are trying to get **a glimpse of the man in the room at that moment**, so that when he does the thing that looks inexplicable, you can see that from inside his framework it was the obvious thing to do.

Five — Cost, and the Credibility Condition

The other half of the ledger is **cost** — what an action will cost the actor. And here the framework makes a claim that is easy to state and constantly forgotten:

A cost is only a cost if it is credible. A prohibition that will not be enforced is not a constraint; it is decoration. A penalty that no one expects to pay does not enter the ledger. When you are reading a historical decision, the question is never "what was forbidden?" but "what was forbidden *and enforced*, by someone with the will and the power to enforce it?"

The corollary is the more useful half. **A credibly enforced cost does not usually stop people from pursuing their interest. It changes the form in which they pursue it.** People do not abandon the thing they need; they find the version of it that the cost cannot reach. And that reshaping — the workaround — is one of the great engines of institutional invention in history.

The single best illustration in the historical record is the medieval Church's ban on usury, the lending of money at interest, which was condemned as a sin and enforced with real penalties against conscience, reputation, and standing. This was a credible cost, and it fell squarely across a thing that merchants could not do without, which is credit. They did not abandon credit. They reshaped it:

The bill of exchange. A merchant needed to move value across a sea full of pirates, and he needed credit, and the loan-at-interest that would have provided both was a sin. So the bill of exchange was developed: a written order to pay a sum, in a different currency, in a different city, at a later date. No coin crossed the water — so the pirates were defeated. And the interest was hidden *inside the exchange rate between the two currencies* — so the usury ban was defeated, because on its face this was not interest on a loan but merely the price of foreign exchange. The Church governed the *naming* of the thing, and the merchants renamed it.

The insurance policy. For three thousand years, sea-risk had been handled by the "bottomry loan": a lender advanced money against a ship, at very high interest, and *the loan was forgiven if the ship sank*. This is insurance with the premium buried inside the interest rate. But it is also, on its face, precisely what the usury doctrine forbade — money lent at a high rate of interest — and as the Church tightened its enforcement (Genoa moved against sea loans under the prohibition in 1369), the instrument became unusable. So the merchants unbundled it. If the problem is that money is being *lent* at interest, then stop lending the money: simply sell the *promise*. I will advance you nothing; I will merely undertake that if your ship is lost, I will pay you its value; and for that undertaking, you will pay me a fee. There is no loan, therefore no interest, therefore no usury.

That free-standing contract — a premium paid, an indemnity promised, no loan anywhere in it — is the insurance policy. It appears in the Italian city-states in the fourteenth century, and the fingerprints of the causal story are visible in the documents themselves: in Genoese notarial insurance contracts of this era the premium is frequently *not written down at all*, an omission which scholars attribute to the canonical rule against usury — the parties preferring not to record the very figure that might expose the deal as a disguised interest-bearing loan. You can read their nervousness in the silence of their own paperwork.

The Church, attempting to suppress a financial practice, midwifed the modern insurance industry. Nobody intended that. It is what happens when a credible cost meets an interest that will not go away.

Six — Convergence (and Why It Is Not Conspiracy)

Convergence is the central term of the framework and its principal explanatory device.

Definition: Convergence is what happens when many people in similar positions, facing a similar problem, independently arrive at similar solutions — producing a pattern of aligned behavior that resembles coordination but involves none.

The mechanism has three components, and it is worth being precise about each.

(a) Shared position produces shared problems. If a thousand merchants all live by long-distance trade, then a thousand merchants all face pirates, all face the usury ban, and all need to fund the wars that protect their routes. No communication is required for them to *have* the same problem. The structure hands it to each of them separately.

(b) Shared problems have few good solutions. This is the crux, and it is what makes history *rhyme*. A structural problem is not an open field; it is a narrow corridor. There are only so many ways to make a ruinous voyage survivable, only so many ways to fund a war you cannot afford, only so many ways to organize covert action under a censorship regime. Intelligent people searching that narrow space will find the same few exits, because the exits are where they are.

The most striking evidence for this is the independent reinvention of the same instrument in unconnected societies. The bottomry loan — the loan forgiven if the ship sinks — appears in Mesopotamia around 1750 BCE, among the Phoenicians, in classical Indian texts, in Greece (where the

orator Demosthenes describes it in detail), and in Rome, whose law recognized a higher permitted interest rate on sea loans on the explicit ground that such a loan was not a mere lending of money but *an adventure involving the risks of the sea*. When a device is invented five times independently, it was not spread by a cabal. It was *discovered*, repeatedly, by people standing on docks with the same problem.

(c) Threat is perceived locally, which is why groups appear to "awaken" together. This is the component that does the most work against theories of class consciousness, so it is stated carefully.

A person whose position is threatened does not need to be told. The information arrives through his own ledger. His rents fall. His license is questioned. His monopoly lapses. His school is graded and found wanting. He learns of the danger from inside his own situation, and he begins looking for a solution — and so does everyone else in that position, at roughly the same time, for the same reason, without any of them communicating.

The result is that a threatened group *appears to act as one*, and appears to have "become aware of itself," when in fact nothing collective has happened at all. What has happened is a thousand private alarms going off simultaneously because they are wired to the same circuit.

And then — this is the part the framework refuses to soften — they may well meet, and plan, and plot. Convergence does not exclude coordination; it *precedes* it. Once a hundred men have independently concluded they are in danger and independently identified the same remedy, the step to organizing is short and they frequently take it. Guilds lobby. Industries organize. Professions capture their regulators.

The claim is only about the *order of operations*, and it has three testable consequences:

- Coordination is **downstream** of convergence, not its cause.
- Coordination is **episodic and reactive** — triggered by a threat, not maintained in permanent session.
- Coordination **dissolves when positions diverge**, because it was never held together by a shared mind.

That last point is the framework's sharpest empirical prediction, and Part VI returns to it.

Seven — The Architect's Hour

Convergence explains diffuse patterns. But history also contains *moments* — bounded episodes in which a small number of well-placed people, facing an acute problem, design a settlement that then becomes canon.

An **architect's hour** has five features:

1. It is **bounded** — a season, a room, a datable meeting. Not a continuous process.
2. It involves a **small number of actors** in apex positions.

3. It responds to a **real problem** — not an invented pretext. The problem is usually genuine and often urgent.
4. The settlement is **skewed**, in the open, toward the position of those designing it. This is not a conspiracy; it is what people do. Given the power to draw the map, you draw it through your own town.
5. It **ends** — and the settlement is handed to institutions that will carry it forward without the architects.

The architect's hour is the framework's concession to the conspiracy theorist, and it is a real one. *Yes: people with power meet in rooms and design things to their own advantage.* The difference is that the architect's hour is **finite**. It is not a secret society in permanent session across the centuries. It is a meeting, and then it is over, and what happens next is not under anybody's control.

Example. On 11 October 1883, at the Grand Pacific Hotel in Chicago, the General Time Convention — a body of American railroad companies — met and voted to reset the clocks of a continent. Until then, every town in North America had kept its own solar time: when the sun stood highest over a town, it was noon *there*, and by one careful count there were about 144 different local times across the continent. This had been harmless for all of history, because nothing moved fast enough for the differences to matter. The railroad was the first thing that did, and on single-track lines, trains kept apart by a timetable read from disagreeing clocks *collided*. The problem was real and it killed people.

The railroads solved it. At noon on 18 November 1883, the clocks of North America were reset to four standard time zones, drawn by the railroads, on boundaries convenient to the railroads, anchored on a meridian chosen through an internal contest among railroad interests about whose city would sit at the center of the nation's time. No legislature was consulted. No public was asked. A private industry rescheduled the most universal fact of every person's daily life, and a newspaper in Indianapolis noticed exactly what had happened, complaining that people would now have to "marry by railroad time, and die by railroad time," because "the Railroad Convention has taken charge of the time business."

That is an architect's hour: real problem, real solution, real public benefit, and the design cut to the convenience of the designers — all of it done in the open, in a hotel, in an afternoon.

Eight — The Institution's Logic

When the architects leave the room, the settlement passes into the keeping of an institution, and from that moment it runs on **the institution's logic** — a momentum that belongs to the structure rather than to anyone's intention, and that will carry the settlement to destinations its designers never aimed at and sometimes would have hated.

This is the term that does the most explanatory work, because it is the answer to the conspiracy theorist's strongest card: *"But look how perfectly the system serves the powerful. How can that be an accident?"* The answer is that it is not an accident and not a plan. It is a **logic**: a structure, once built, gener-

ates its own consequences, and those consequences are shaped by the structure's design long after everyone who designed it is dust.

Three modes of the institution's logic recur:

(a) Self-execution without enforcement. After the railroads reset the clocks in 1883, standard time had **no legal force in the United States for thirty-five years**. Congress passed nothing. No citizen was compelled to keep it. And the entire country kept it anyway — because if your watch disagreed with the station clock, you missed your train. Every individual, reasoning privately from his own cost, converged on the railroads' time, and the convergence *was* the enforcement. There was no enforcer. Not until 1918, when a wartime government needed logistical coordination, did Congress finally write the railroads' private map into federal law — at which point the arrangement shed its origin, so that Americans now experience time zones as a creation of government rather than as the surviving convenience of a nineteenth-century railway timetable.

(b) The purpose the founder never chose. The Jesuits are the most dramatic case in the record. Ignatius founded the Society of Jesus in 1540 as a mobile corps of preachers and missionaries, vowed to go, in the exact words of their founding charter, "wherever he [the Pope] may be pleased to send us to any regions whatsoever." Education appears in that charter — but as one item in a list, phrased as "the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity," meaning *catechism*. It was not the driving purpose.

And yet the Jesuits became the greatest teaching order in the history of the Church, educating the Catholic ruling class of an entire continent and sitting beside its thrones as confessors to kings. Why? Because in 1548 they opened a college at Messina in Sicily for the sons of the local elite; it was a spectacular success; and requests flooded in from cities and princes across Catholic Europe who wanted the same for their sons. The Society had a charter of *availability* — it was built to be sent anywhere and set to anything — and the world's demand poured into that opening. The purpose the Jesuits became famous for was **chosen for them by the world**, and accepted by an order constitutionally designed to accept whatever it was sent to do.

(c) The structure that reverses its makers. The sharpest form. In 1710, the Parliament of England passed the Statute of Anne, the world's first copyright law. It was passed at the urging of the London booksellers' guild, the Stationers' Company, which had held a perpetual monopoly on printing and had lost its legal protection when the licensing laws lapsed in 1695. For fifteen years the Stationers had petitioned to get their monopoly back *as a monopoly*, and had failed every time — because a guild asking Parliament to restore a guild's privileges is transparently self-serving, and because the monopoly had been bound up with censorship, which Parliament had just deliberately abandoned.

So they changed the *thing they were asking for*. They stopped asking for the printer's monopoly and started asking for **the author's right** — dressing their commercial interest in a figure Parliament could honor, and knowing that an author, having no press and no capital, would sell his new right straight to a bookseller exactly as he had always sold his manuscript. The bill was introduced under a title that wore

the disguise openly: *A Bill for the Encouragement of Learning, and for Securing the Property of Copies of Books to the Rightful Owners thereof.*

But Parliament wrote two things into the act that the booksellers had not wanted: a **limited term** (fourteen years, renewable once) and a genuine vesting of the right **in the author**. The booksellers accepted both, because in 1710 they cost nothing. And sixty years later those two provisions destroyed them. When the booksellers went to court arguing that beneath the statutory copyright lay a *perpetual* common-law author's right which authors had assigned to them forever, the House of Lords in *Donaldson v. Becket* (1774) held that the statute had replaced any such right — that copyright was limited, that it expired, and that when it expired the work belonged to everyone. **The public domain was created by the very author's-right fiction the booksellers had invented to save their monopoly.** They had forged a key to lock their door forever, and the key, in another hand, opened it.

Lord Camden, in that case, traced the booksellers' claimed ancient right to its actual origins with contempt, saying their arguments were "founded on patents, privileges, Star Chamber decrees, and the bye laws of the Stationers' Company; all of them the effects of the grossest tyranny and usurpation." He was doing, in 1774, what this framework tries to do: refusing to accept an institution's story about its own origins, and going to look at where it actually came from.

Nine — Layering and Inheritance

The final term. Institutions are not built once; they are **inherited**, and each generation of inheritors extends the structure it received, for its own purposes, using the authority of the original.

The consequence is that a mature institution is a **sediment**, not a design — and the crucial point is that *it does not look like one*. Because each later hand writes its change into the founder's edifice, and because doing so *amplifies the founder's authority* (that being the whole reason to route your change through him), the accumulated structure reads as a seamless plan. The layering conceals itself.

This is why a modern person, looking at any old institution, feels the pull of the conspiracy theory. The thing *looks* designed. It looks designed because a hundred people, across centuries, each made it look a little more like their own intentions, and each attributed their work to the founder.

The 1918 Standard Time Act did this: it ratified the railroads' private zones as federal law and, while it was there, bolted on an entirely new element the railroads had never contemplated — daylight saving time — so that the two are now received together as one law, and the citizen defends the whole as the natural order.

PART IV

The Evidence

A framework is worth what it explains. This part sets out the cases against which position logic has been tested. Each is described from scratch; no prior knowledge is assumed.

One — The Illuminati: The Conspiracy That Was Built From a Corpse

This is the founding template of all modern conspiracy belief, and it is the framework's cleanest demonstration, because it runs the pattern *twice*.

The real order. In 1776, a 28-year-old law professor named Adam Weishaupt founded a secret society at the University of Ingolstadt in Bavaria. His position was specific and cramped: Bavaria was an intensely conservative Catholic state where Enlightenment books were censored and the universities were dominated by the Jesuits; Weishaupt was an Enlightenment rationalist and, at 25, had been appointed to a chair of canon law that had been held by Jesuits for ninety years, surrounded by a faculty of former Jesuits who resented and worked against him. He wanted to circulate ideas his state had banned, and every open channel was closed. So he reached for the materials at hand — and the materials at hand were the organizational tools of his enemies: secrecy, hierarchy, graded initiation, obedience to unseen superiors. He built a mirror of the Jesuit order to fight the Jesuits, because it was the only model of effective organization his formation had given him. It began as a reading circle of five.

Now note the crucial analytical point. The features that later made the Illuminati look sinister — the secrecy, the hidden superiors, the infiltration of other organizations — are not evidence of a sinister *aim*. **They are the generic mechanics of any covert organization operating under censorship**, and they look identical whether the hidden cargo is world domination or a banned copy of Voltaire. *The legend reads the mechanics as the motive.*

And the real order died an entirely ordinary death. It grew for a few years, fractured in a personal power struggle between Weishaupt and his chief organizer, Baron Adolph von Knigge (who was expelled in 1784), and was then banned by a nervous Bavarian Elector in a series of edicts from 1784 to 1787. Weishaupt lost his chair and fled. After the mid-1780s, the order simply disappears from the historical record. **It lasted under a decade and was destroyed by a faculty quarrel and a prince's decree.**

The myth. The Illuminati conspiracy theory was not built while the order lived. It was assembled in **1797** — more than a decade after the order was dead — by two men working from the confiscated papers the Bavarian government had *published in order to bury it*. The French ex-Jesuit Augustin Barruel published *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* in London; in the same year the Scottish natural philosopher John Robison published *Proofs of a Conspiracy*. Both argued that the French Revolution — that overwhelming, terrifying, seemingly inexplicable event — had been secretly authored by the Illuminati.

And here is the finding that makes this case decisive. **The two men had never coordinated.** They did not know of each other's work. And Barruel, on discovering the parallel, wrote to Robison a sentence that is this framework's central mechanism confessing itself:

> "Without knowing it, we have fought for the same cause with the same arms, and pursued the same course."

Read it with the vocabulary in hand. *Without knowing it* — no collusion. *The same cause with the same arms* — convergence. And *why* did they converge? Because they occupied the same position: both were men of the threatened old order (Barruel a Jesuit of the Church the Revolution had assaulted, Robison a conservative of the British establishment it had frightened), both faced the same unbearable event, and both reached, from the same vantage, for the same explanation — a hidden author. There were only so many solutions visible from where they stood, and they found the same one.

The founding text of the belief that secret societies secretly control history was itself produced not by a secret society, but by exactly the uncoordinated, position-driven convergence that this framework offers in place of the cabal. The thing the world took as proof that hidden hands rule history is, read closely, the proof that they do not.

Two — The Jesuits: A Real Power That Was Not a Cabal

The Jesuits are the hard case, because here the institution was genuinely enormous — a disciplined, centralized, global order, educating the Catholic elite of Europe and confessing its kings, reaching from Paraguay to Japan. If any real institution ever earned the conspiracy reading, it is this one.

The framework's answer is that the Society flourished for two centuries not because it ruled the powers but because **the interests of the powers converged upon it.** The Pope valued the Jesuits as his most loyal and mobile instrument. The Catholic kings valued them because they educated the royal children, staffed the confessionals, and supplied able servants. The elites valued them because they gave their sons the best available education and a common European culture. These were *distinct interests, held by distinct parties, from distinct positions* — and for two centuries they happened to point the same way.

And a convergence, unlike a conspiracy, **lasts exactly as long as the interests do**. In the eighteenth century, the Catholic monarchies embarked on the great project of building the centralizing modern state — drawing all authority within their borders into the hands of the crown. And this **flipped the sign on every Jesuit trait at once**. The order was *supranational* (loyal to a general in Rome) — an asset under convergence, intolerable to a king consolidating his realm. It was *autonomous and wealthy*, running its own colleges and missions — an asset before, now a "state within the state." It was *close to the papacy* — an asset before, now a rival allegiance.

Nothing about the Jesuits had changed. The positions of the kings had changed. And the result was swift and total. Portugal expelled them in 1759, France in 1764, Spain in 1767. The Bourbon courts then turned their pressure on Rome itself, and in 1773 **the Pope suppressed his own most loyal order** — Clement XIV's brief *Dominus ac Redemptor* dissolving the Society worldwide, citing not heresy or crime but the *peace of the Church*, which is to say: political necessity. Some 23,000 Jesuits ceased to be Jesuits. Hundreds of colleges closed.

A power that truly ruled the kings of Europe could not have been erased by those kings in fifteen years. The speed and totality of the destruction is the refutation of the cabal reading — and the fact that the Society was *restored* in 1814, when the political positions turned back, confirms it. The Jesuits were never the masters of the powers. They were the *instrument* of the powers, and an instrument is discarded the moment the hand that holds it wants it gone.

Three — The Flexner Report: An Architect's Hour With a Laundered Signature

In 1910, a report on American medical education was published by the Carnegie Foundation, written by Abraham Flexner — a schoolteacher and educational critic who was not a doctor and had never studied medicine. It condemned most American medical schools, and in the following two decades more than half of them closed.

The conventional story is that a disinterested foundation commissioned an independent expert who told the truth about a scandal. The actual story is a perfect architect's hour.

The American Medical Association had wanted the field of medicine closed to competitors for sixty years, and had been unable to achieve it. Its own Council on Medical Education had *already surveyed and graded the schools*, and had declined to publish the findings under its own name — because a report from the organized medical profession grading its competitors out of existence would be dismissed, correctly, as a guild restraining trade. **The profession possessed the knowledge and the standards. What it lacked was disinterested authority.**

So it routed the judgment through a party that had disinterested authority: a philanthropic foundation, and a non-physician's signature. Flexner conducted his survey often accompanied by the AMA Council's own secretary. And the president of the Carnegie Foundation, Henry Pritchett, wrote to the head of the AMA's Council describing the relationship in five words that give the whole game away: in this work, he wrote, "we have been hand in glove."

The independence was the managed appearance. The coordination was the structural fact. And note what the framework says about this and what it does not. The problem was **real** — many of those schools were genuinely bad, and the reform genuinely raised the quality of American medicine. The architects were **sincere** — Flexner really believed in scientific medicine and was right about it. And the settlement was **skewed**, because a standard that requires laboratories and endowments falls lightly on rich schools and lethally on poor ones — closing, along with the frauds, nearly every institution through which Americans without wealth, and Black Americans in particular, had been able to enter the profession.

Then the institution's logic took over, and here Flexner named it himself. Addressing the state medical licensing boards in 1911, he told them precisely how the whole field could be moved by their one power — the power to decide whose graduates could sit for a license:

> "The examination for licensure is the lever with which the entire field may be lifted; for the power to examine is the power to destroy."

The report itself closed no school and had no legal force. But once the state licensing boards resolved to admit to their examinations only the graduates of schools the profession's own council rated acceptable, a private body's ratings acquired, in the historian Paul Starr's phrase, "the force of law." A closed loop: the profession sets the standard, the standard governs the license, the license governs whether a school can exist. It has run for a century, enforced not by plotters but by sincere people protecting the public — and it has held down the supply of physicians the whole time, which is precisely what the profession wanted in 1850 and could not get by asking.

Four — Venice: The Machinery of Finance, Improvised

Banking is the deepest object of conspiracy belief in the modern world. Venice is where you can watch its instruments get invented, one at a time, by people solving immediate problems.

Venice was a city built on mudflats with no land, no fields, and no ore. It could trade or die. Therefore its ruling class *was* a merchant class, and therefore when the Venetian state had a problem, the men solving it reasoned as merchants — reaching for loans and transferable claims where a king would reach for levies.

The bond. Venice needed to fund wars it could not afford. So it imposed *forced loans* on wealthy citizens — and the citizens preferred this to a tax, because a loan, unlike a tax, might be repaid. To make the burden bearable, the state attached *interest*. And then, because a citizen with his money locked up might need it back — for a debt, a venture, a daughter's dowry — Venice allowed the claims to be **sold to other people**.

That last step, taken to accommodate citizens who wanted to cash out early, created a *market in government debt*. In 1262 the Republic consolidated its tangle of overlapping war loans into a single permanent fund, the Monte Vecchio, paying 5% interest semiannually, perpetual, and tradable. The modern sovereign bond market is descended from an accommodation to a Venetian who wanted his money back.

Why the promise was credible — and this is the framework's cost principle written into a constitution. Why did anyone believe Venice would pay? Because **the men who voted the debt were the men who held it.** The largest bondholders were the same governing families who sat in the councils and made the fiscal decisions. A council of bondholders will not vote to stop paying itself. *A promise is credible exactly to the degree that breaking it is costly to the promisor* — and Venice made default costly to its rulers by making its rulers the ones who would be robbed.

And they were not spared. When the wars against Genoa went badly in the late fourteenth century, the price of Venetian bonds collapsed from 90% of face value to 18%, and interest payments were missed in the fifteenth century. **The insiders lost, heavily.** A machine designed for the costless domination of others does not sink its own designers.

The bank. Moneychangers sat at tables — *banchi* — at the Rialto, because Venice's trade brought in coins of every realm and someone had to value them. Merchants began leaving coin with them rather than hauling it around; and having done so, began settling debts by simply instructing the moneychanger to move the sum from one account to another *on his books*. That is deposit and transfer banking, and it arose because **the moneychanger's table was already where the coin was.** Position, not plan.

Then those private banks lent out the deposits — as banks do — and therefore failed, repeatedly, as banks do. And the Venetian state, *reluctantly* — it voted to create a public bank in 1584, then revoked the law, then dithered, then acted only after more failures — finally established the Banco della Piazza di Rialto in 1587: a deliberately dull, fully-reserved, **non-lending** deposit bank, stripped of the very function that had made the private banks profitable and fragile alike. The state was dragged into banking by catastrophe, not ambition.

And fiat money was an accident. In 1619 a merchant named Giovanni Vendramin proposed that his own claims on the government be made transferable through state-managed accounts. The Republic agreed and set up the Banco del Giro as a **temporary** clearing mechanism, expected to be wound up in *three years*. It was not wound up. The war of the Mantuan Succession and the plague of 1629–31 swelled the accounts, the deadline was extended year by year, and the transferable credits on its books hardened into what has been described as likely the first experiment with a purely fiduciary, state-issued, legal-tender money. **The supposed masterpiece of the financial conspiracy — paper money — was a stopgap that outstayed its welcome.**

Five — Lloyd's of London: An Institution That Grew in a Coffee House

In the late 1680s, a man named Edward Lloyd kept a coffee house near the London docks. He was not an insurer. He was a coffee-seller who *sold information*: he sent runners to the docks and built a network of correspondents in ports across Britain, so that his house had the best shipping news in London. Naturally, shipping men came there.

And the shipping men who came for the news were exactly the men who *needed* marine insurance and exactly the men rich enough to *provide* it — all sitting in one room with the best available intelligence about which ships were where. So they began insuring one another at his tables. A merchant would carry a paper describing his ship and voyage around the room, and those willing to bear a share of the risk would write their names **underneath** the description.

From that physical act comes the word **underwriter**. The tables they rented were called *boxes*, and underwriters at Lloyd's of London sit at "boxes" to this day. In 1774 the members formalized as the Society of Lloyd's.

The greatest insurance market on earth has no founder, no charter, and no design. It grew in a coffee house because that was where the news was and the money was — like a crystal in a solution.

PART V

Where This Sits in the Literature

Position logic is not built from nothing, and honesty requires locating it. This part introduces the relevant thinkers to a reader who may not know them, and states precisely where the framework agrees and disagrees.

One — Marx, Fairly Stated

Karl Marx (1818–1883) is the most important theorist of historical structure, and this framework is offered *against* his account — which requires first stating it correctly, because he is usually caricatured.

Marx did **not** think history was a puppet show run by capitalists. He believed that the material conditions of production shape society; that people's ideas and options are conditioned by their place in those relations; and that historical change is driven by conflict between **classes** — groups defined by their shared relation to the means of production. Crucially, and to his enormous credit, he insisted on human agency within structure. His most famous formulation, from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), is one this framework endorses without reservation:

> "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."

That sentence could serve as the epigraph of position logic. It says: real people, really choosing, inside constraints they did not choose. **On this, there is no disagreement.**

The disagreement is about a single mechanism, and it is precise.

Marx needs a class to become a **collective actor**. He distinguishes a class that merely exists as a category — a "class in itself" — from a class that has become conscious of itself, organized itself, and begun acting as a unified political force: a "class for itself." He states the distinction in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), describing workers:

> "The combination of capital has created for this mass a common situation, common interests. This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself."

And Marx was clear that shared position **alone** was not enough. In the *Eighteenth Brumaire* he describes the French smallholding peasants, who all share an economic position, and denies that they constitute a class in the full sense: "Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class." Marx knew perfectly well that a shared situation does not automatically produce a collective agent. He required something more — consciousness, organization, the transformation into a class *for itself* — and his theory of history *needs* that transformation to occur, because it is the engine of the change he predicted.

This is the exact point of divergence, and it can be stated in one sentence: position logic holds that the extra step is not necessary, and that everything Marx wants collective consciousness to explain can be explained without it.

If a hundred Venetian merchants all respond to the Church's usury ban by inventing workarounds, you do not need them to have "become aware of themselves as a merchant class." You need only each merchant, from inside his own position, to see the same wall and reach for the same exit. If the Bourbon monarchs of Europe all turn on the Jesuits within a decade, you do not need a "monarchical class consciousness." You need only that each king, pursuing his own consolidation of his own realm, independently found the same supranational order in his way.

Position does the work. Consciousness is a spare part.

And removing it buys three things:

(a) It explains fragmentation, which class consciousness cannot. If a class has one mind and one interest, it should hold together. But the historical record is full of supposedly unified classes *shattering along the seams of position* the moment their situations diverge. Weishaupt and Knigge converge to build the Illuminati and then destroy each other over its control. The popes, kings, and Catholic elites converge on the Jesuits for two hundred years and then dismantle them when the making of the modern state gives the kings a new interest. The London booksellers converge to pass the Statute of Anne and are then destroyed by the author's-right principle they themselves invented. A class-consciousness model predicts cohesion. A position model predicts cohesion *while positions align* and fracture the instant they don't — and fracture is what the record shows.

(b) It explains convergence between parties who could not possibly share a consciousness. Barruel the French Catholic ex-Jesuit and Robison the Scottish Protestant natural philosopher arrived at the identical conspiracy theory in the same year without contact — and one of them said so in writing. No shared class, no shared church, no shared nation, no communication. Only a shared *position* relative to a shared threat. Class consciousness cannot explain this. Position explains it trivially.

(c) It removes a step that has no mechanism. And this is not an objection invented here; it was made forcefully from *inside* the Marxist tradition. The philosopher **Jon Elster** — a serious scholar of Marx, whose *Making Sense of Marx* (1985) is a landmark of the movement known as *analytical Marxism*, which tried to rebuild Marx's theory on rigorous foundations — attacked the habit of explaining events by saying they "serve the interests of capital." The problem with such explanations, Elster wrote, is that they **"postulate a purpose without a purposive actor."**

That phrase is the whole objection in five words. If you say a policy happened *because* it served capital's interests, you have named a purpose. But whose? Purposes belong to people. Unless you can name the actual human beings who wanted it and show how they got it, you have not explained anything — you have merely described the outcome and then declared it the cause. Elster's demand was for **microfoundations**: an account of how individual people, with individual reasons, produce the aggregate pattern.

Position logic is an attempt to supply exactly those microfoundations — with the individual reason being *the actor's own ledger, read from his own position*.

(d) A supporting finding from a different direction. The economist **Mancur Olson**, in *The Logic of Collective Action* (1965), demonstrated something devastating for any theory that expects shared

interest to produce collective action automatically: in large groups, it usually *doesn't*. Because each individual benefits from the group's success whether or not he personally contributes, the rational move is to let others do the work — the **free-rider problem**. Olson's conclusion is that large groups with obvious common interests routinely *fail* to organize.

This cuts hard against the intuitive picture of a class spontaneously mobilizing to defend itself. It also explains something position logic predicts: that coordination is *episodic and requires a trigger*. Groups don't stay mobilized. They mobilize under acute threat — when the cost of not acting becomes personal and immediate — and they demobilize when it passes.

Two — Popper and the Scottish Enlightenment

Position logic's nearest ancestor is Karl Popper's critique of "the conspiracy theory of society," discussed in Part I, and behind Popper stands Adam Ferguson's insight that institutions are "the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design."

Popper argued that the main task of the social sciences is "the task of analysing the unintended social repercussions of intentional human actions" — a sentence that describes the institution's logic almost exactly. The phrase to hold onto is *unintended repercussions of intentional actions*: the actions are intentional, the repercussions are not. That is the space this framework works in.

Where position logic adds to Popper: Popper was largely engaged in refutation, and his account of what to put in the cabal's place is thin. He tells you that unintended consequences matter; he does not give you a systematic vocabulary for reading *which* intentional actions, by *which* actors, in *which* positions, produce them. Position logic tries to supply the reading instruments — position, field of the visible, formation, credible cost, convergence, architect's hour, institution's logic, layering — that turn Popper's negative insight into a positive method.

Where it also differs, importantly: **Popper's tradition tends to underweight intention and interest.** In the hands of Hayek, "spontaneous order" becomes something close to a defense of existing arrangements as natural and efficient. Position logic refuses that. The architects are *real*, their skew is *real*, and the fact that no one designed the whole does not mean no one was pushing. The framework is Popperian about *outcomes* and unsparing about *processes*.

Three — Merton, Path Dependence, and Historical Institutionalism

Two other bodies of work are worth naming for the reader who wants to go further.

The sociologist **Robert K. Merton**, in a 1936 paper titled *The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action*, gave the canonical treatment of how deliberate acts produce results their authors neither intended nor foresaw. It is the direct ancestor of the "institution's logic."

And the literature on **path dependence** — developed by economists including Paul David and W. Brian Arthur in the 1980s, and imported into political science as *historical institutionalism* by scholars

such as Paul Pierson (*Politics in Time*, 2004) — formalizes the idea that early, often arbitrary choices become locked in and shape everything downstream, because the costs of switching rise the longer a path is followed. This is the mechanism by which the *architect's hour* becomes *canon*: not because the original choice was correct, but because once everyone has organized around it, the cost of unwinding it exceeds the benefit.

Position logic's contribution here is to insist on the *human* front end of path dependence. The literature is very good at explaining why a path, once taken, persists. It is less interested in *who was standing where when the path was chosen, and whose convenience the first step served.* That first step is the architect's hour, and it is almost never neutral.

Four — The Honest Summary of Where This Sits

Position logic is a **structural** theory that refuses a **collective subject**. It takes from Marx the seriousness about material conditions and the insistence that people's options and vision are shaped by their place in a structure. It takes from Popper and Ferguson the insistence that outcomes are not designed. It takes from Elster the demand for microfoundations, and it accepts Olson's demonstration that shared interest does not automatically produce collective action.

What it puts in the place where Marx put *class* is not the individual, exactly, and not the market. It is the **institution** — the durable structure, built in a bounded hour by identifiable people with identifiable interests, that then runs forward under its own logic, is inherited by people who did not build it, and produces effects that no one chose.

The claim is not that this is more comforting than Marx. It is *less* comforting, and Part VII will explain why.

PART VI

What the Framework Predicts, and What Would Falsify It

A framework that cannot fail is not a framework; it is a mood. Position logic makes claims that could be wrong, and honesty requires stating them as such.

What It Predicts

1. Groups will fracture along the seams of position. When the positions of members of an apparently unified bloc diverge, the bloc will split — quickly, bitterly, and along the exact line where the interests parted. It will *not* hold together out of class loyalty, shared identity, or ideological solidarity, except where those things are themselves position-serving.

2. Coordination will be reactive and episodic. Where we find coordination among the powerful, we will find that it was *triggered* by a threat, that it *followed* a period of independent convergence, and that it *decayed* when the threat passed. We will not find permanent secret directorates in continuous session across generations.

3. Independent invention will recur across unconnected societies. Because structural problems have few good solutions, similar structures will produce similar institutions in places with no contact — history rhyming without repeating.

4. Institutions will betray their founders. Because a structure's logic outruns its makers' intent, we should expect to find institutions producing results their architects would have hated — and occasionally destroying the very interests they were built to serve.

5. Beneficiaries will not usually be authors. In most cases, the party that benefits most from an arrangement will turn out *not* to have designed it, and the actual designers will turn out to have been solving a different, smaller, more immediate problem.

What Would Falsify It

The framework would be badly damaged, and possibly refuted, by any of the following:

(a) A documented standing directorate. If a group of powerful people were shown to have coordinated *continuously*, in secret, across multiple generations, with a stable membership and a coherent long-range plan that they successfully executed — and if that plan, rather than the accumulation of improvisations, explained a major institution — then position logic would be wrong about that institution and would be in serious trouble generally. The framework's bet is that we will keep failing to find this. It is a bet, and it could lose.

(b) Cohesion without shared interest. If groups reliably held together *after* their positions diverged — if the members of a class continued to act as a bloc when it was no longer in their individual interests to do so — then something like class consciousness would be doing real explanatory work that position cannot do, and the framework would need it.

(c) Convergence without shared position. If people in *radically different* positions, facing different problems and different incentives, reliably converged on the same solutions, then position would not

be doing the explanatory work claimed for it, and some other mechanism (shared ideology, shared culture, direct influence) would be the real driver.

(d) Architects who successfully controlled the long run. If the original designers of major institutions consistently got what they intended over centuries — if the institution's logic reliably served the founders' aims rather than departing from them — then the "institution's logic" would be an unnecessary complication, and a straightforward intentionalist account would be better.

The cases examined so far have not produced these results. But they might. That is what it means for a framework to be empirical.

PART VII

What This Framework Is Not

The most likely misuse of position logic is as an **excuse** — a sophisticated way of saying that nobody is to blame, that everything is structure, that the powerful are as trapped as everyone else. That reading is a betrayal of the framework, and this final part exists to foreclose it.

One — It Is Not Anti-Intentional

Position logic does not say that people don't mean things. It says the opposite. **The architects are real.** They are shrewd, they are awake, they know what they are doing, and they skew the settlement toward themselves *deliberately*. The AMA knew exactly why it routed its judgment through Carnegie. The Stationers knew exactly why they put the author's name on their monopoly. The railroads knew exactly whose convenience the time zones served.

The framework's claim is not that intention is absent but that it is **bounded** — that intention operates in hours, not in centuries, and that what happens between those hours is not under anyone's control.

Two — It Is Not Exculpatory. It Is Worse.

Here is the thing that must not be missed. **The cabal theory is the comforting one.**

If a hidden group of villains designed the system, then the system has an author, the author can be exposed, and exposure is a solution. Cut off the head and the beast dies. Conspiracy theory, for all its paranoia, is *fundamentally optimistic*: it says the world is the way it is because bad people made it that way, and therefore the world could be fixed by removing them.

Position logic says something far bleaker. It says that an arrangement can be systematically skewed toward the powerful **without anyone having skewed it** — that the credentialing system can hold down the supply of doctors for a century with no one in the loop intending it, enforced at every step by sincere people doing what they believe is right; that the medical care of a nation can be chained to employment because of a wage freeze in a war that ended eighty years ago; that a structure can produce the outcomes a conspiracy would have produced, with no conspiracy, and therefore **with no head to cut off.**

There is no room to raid. There are only positions, and the people standing in them, doing what people in those positions do — and an institution grinding forward on a logic that no living person chose and that no living person can simply decide to stop.

That is not an excuse. It is a harder indictment, and it demands a harder response: not the exposure of villains, but the *redesign of positions* — changing the structure of costs and benefits so that the people standing in those places find that different actions serve them. You do not fix a position-driven system by finding the guilty. You fix it by changing what it pays to do.

Three — It Does Not Deny That Conspiracies Exist

People collude. They plot. They coordinate in secret, and sometimes they succeed. Nothing in this framework denies it, and Popper himself was careful to grant it.

The claim is about *frequency, duration, and explanatory priority*:

- Coordination happens, but it is usually **downstream of convergence** — people who already independently wanted the same thing, discovering they can get it faster together.
- Coordination is usually **episodic**, triggered by a threat, and it **decays**.
- And when you find a great institution and ask where it came from, the answer will almost always be **an architect's hour, an institution's logic, and a long inheritance** — not a plot.

The right question to ask of any institution is not *"who benefits?"* — that question, as Popper saw, smuggles the answer into the premise. The right questions are:

Who was standing where? What could they see? What did the decision cost them, and was that cost credible? What did the structure do afterward, on its own, when they were gone? And who inherited it, and what did they use it for?

Conclusion

You cannot take the human being out of human history. That is the first commitment of this framework and the one from which everything else follows. There is no Providence arranging events, no impersonal historical law grinding toward a destination, no invisible hand producing optimal arrangements from nothing, and no class-mind waking up to defend itself.

There are only people, standing where they stand, seeing what their position allows them to see, and making decisions with the materials at hand.

Because positions repeat across societies, and because any structural problem admits of only so many good solutions, people in similar positions make similar decisions — independently, without conspiring, without even knowing that others are doing the same. This is why history *rhymes* without repeating: not because a pattern is imposed from above, but because the same predicament, encountered by different people in different centuries, has only a few exits, and intelligent people find them.

Some of those decisions become canon. They are institutionalized, and the institution acquires a logic that outruns everything its founders wanted. And then other people inherit it — people who never met the founders, who face problems the founders never imagined, and who bend the inherited apparatus to purposes it was never built for, writing their changes into the founder's authority until the whole accumulated sediment looks like a plan.

It is not a plan. It is a residue.

The bond was not invented to enslave nations; it was a way for a Venetian to get his money back. Insurance was not invented to deny your claim; it was a way to make a voyage happen that no sane man would otherwise attempt. Copyright was not invented for authors; it was a coat cut by booksellers —

and then it turned on them and created the public domain. Time zones were not decreed by government; they were drawn by railroads and ratified thirty-five years later. Your health insurance is attached to your job because of a wage freeze in 1943.

None of these people were building the world we live in. Each was solving the problem in front of him, with the materials at hand, within the field his position let him see.

And that — not Providence, not the invisible hand, and not the cabal — is how the world got made.

Tested, not revealed.

Sources and Further Reading

Every quotation in this paper has been verified to a published source. None is invented. The following notes give the reader the means to check them and to go further.

On the two failed explanations. Adam Ferguson's phrase — institutions as "the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design" — is from *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), Part III, Section 2. Friedrich Hayek made it central to his theory of spontaneous order; see his essay "The Results of Human Action but not of Human Design," in *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas* (1978).

Karl Popper's critique of "the conspiracy theory of society" appears in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945), especially Chapter 14, "The Autonomy of Sociology," and is restated in *Conjectures and Refutations* (1963). The definition quoted — "the view that an explanation of a social phenomenon consists in the discovery of the men or groups who are interested in the occurrence of this phenomenon (sometimes it is a hidden interest which has first to be revealed) and who have planned and conspired to bring it about" — and his statement that the main task of the social sciences is "the task of analysing the unintended social repercussions of intentional human actions" are from that work. His characterization of conspiracy theory as secularized theism ("It comes from abandoning God and then asking: 'Who is in his place?'") and his remark that "it is one of the striking things about social life that nothing ever comes off as intended" are widely reproduced in the literature on Popper and conspiracy theory. A valuable critical engagement is Charles Pigden, "Popper Revisited, or What Is Wrong With Conspiracy Theories?" (*Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 1995), which argues that Popper's target is a stronger thesis than most people actually hold.

On Marx. The quotations are from primary texts, available in full at the Marxists Internet Archive. "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please..." is the opening of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), Chapter 1. The passage denying that the French smallholding peasants constitute a class in the full sense is from Chapter 7 of the same work. "This mass is thus already a class as against capital, but not yet for itself" is from *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), Chapter 2. Readers should be aware that the "class in itself / class for itself" distinction is contested among Marx scholars, some of whom deny that Marx held it in the systematic form later attributed to him; the paper's argument does not depend on that dispute, only on the plain fact that Marx required organization and consciousness for a class to become a political actor.

On the critique from within Marxism. Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), is the central text of analytical Marxism's demand for microfoundations. Elster's charge that functionalist explanations "postulate a purpose without a purposive actor" is from his 1982 article "Marxism, Functionalism and Game Theory" (*Theory and Society* 11:4), quoted here as reproduced in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Methodological Individualism, which is an excellent survey of this whole debate. See also G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (1978), and Erik Olin Wright's work on class analysis, for the range of positions within analytical Marxism.

On collective action. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Harvard University Press, 1965). Olson's demonstration that large groups with shared interests frequently fail to organize, owing to free-rider incentives, is the standard reference.

On unintended consequences and path dependence. Robert K. Merton, "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action," *American Sociological Review* 1:6 (1936). On path dependence: Paul David, "Clio and the Economics of QWERTY," *American Economic Review* 75:2 (1985); W. Brian Arthur, *Increasing Returns and Path Dependence in the Economy* (1994); and, for the political-science application, Paul Pierson, *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton, 2004).

On the historical cases. The Illuminati: the standard reference accounts of Adam Weishaupt and the Bavarian Illuminati; on the manufacture of the myth, Augustin Barruel's *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (1797–98) and John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy* (1797), with Barruel's letter to Robison ("Without knowing it, we have fought for the same cause with the same arms, and pursued the same course") as reproduced in the scholarship; see Michael Taylor, "British Conservatism, the Illuminati, and the Conspiracy Theory of the French Revolution, 1797–1802," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (2014), and Mike Jay, "Darkness Over All: John Robison and the Birth of the Illuminati Conspiracy," *The Public Domain Review*.

The Jesuits: John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Harvard University Press, 1993), is the essential scholarly work. The *Formula of the Institute* (1540) is quoted from the published English text (Portal to Jesuit Studies, Boston College), including the fourth-vow language "wherever he may be pleased to send us to any regions whatsoever" and the ministry of "the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity." The suppression is documented in Clement XIV's brief *Dominus ac Redemptor* (21 July 1773).

Flexner: Abraham Flexner, *Medical Education in the United States and Canada* (Carnegie Foundation Bulletin No. 4, 1910). Henry Pritchett's "hand in glove" letter to Arthur Dean Bevan is reproduced in the historical literature on the report. Flexner's statement to the National Confederation of State Medical Examining and Licensing Boards in 1911 — "The examination for licensure is the lever with which the entire field may be lifted; for the power to examine is the power to destroy" — is from the published proceedings of that meeting. Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (Basic Books, 1982), is the indispensable account of how the profession's ratings acquired "the force of law." On the racial consequences, see the substantial recent literature in *JAMA* and the *AMA Journal of Ethics*.

Copyright: the Statute of Anne (8 Anne c. 19, 1710); *Donaldson v. Becket* (1774), with Lord Camden's speech ("founded on patents, privileges, Star Chamber decrees, and the bye laws of the Stationers' Company; all of them the effects of the grossest tyranny and usurpation") from the parliamentary report of the case. See Mark Rose, *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (Harvard, 1993), and John Feather, "The Book Trade in Politics: The Making of the Copyright Act of 1710."

Venice and finance: Frederic C. Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Johns Hopkins, 1973); Reinhold C. Mueller, *The Venetian Money Market: Banks, Panics, and the Public Debt, 1200–1500* (Johns Hopkins, 1997); Gino Luzzatto's foundational studies of Venetian public debt. On usury and the reshaping of financial instruments, John H. Munro, "The Medieval Origins of the 'Financial Revolution': Usury, Rentes, and Negotiability" (2003).

Insurance: on bottomry and the ancient roots, the standard reference treatments; on the fourteenth-century Italian emergence of the standalone policy under pressure of the usury ban, and the notable omission of premiums from Genoese notarial contracts, the scholarship summarized in *The Actuary* and the standard histories. On Lloyd's, the Insurance Museum's account and the Insurance Information Institute's timeline.

Standard time: on the General Time Convention of 11 October 1883 and the reset of 18 November 1883, the work of Ian R. Bartky; the Indianapolis *Sentinel*'s protest ("marry by railroad time, and die by railroad time"; "the Railroad Convention has taken charge of the time business") is reproduced in the standard accounts.

American health insurance: the National Academies volume *Employment and Health Benefits* (1993), chapter on "Origins and Evolution of Employment-Based Health Benefits," documents the 1943 War Labor Board and IRS rulings and the resulting expansion of coverage; see also Paul Starr, above.

A working paper of the Patterns of Power *project.*
Tested, not revealed.